

## **PROPOSAL for COLLEGE HONORS**

### **English Department - Creative Project**

1. Title: The Radio Star

2. Abstract:

For my creative thesis, I plan to write a radio drama in verse that acts as a homage to 1940s radio dramas. In an age in which radio podcasts have exploded as a cultural phenomenon, this project is given more relevance as I explore how I can capture the essence and panache of early radio dramas through poetry and translate that back into a radio drama of my own. I will study the cultural significance of these dramas as well as their diction, language, and idioms to give this collection of poetry and this script authenticity.

3. Description of Project:

In the 1940s, radio dramas were an important form of entertainment and escapism during the second World War. Today, with the advent of podcasts and the internet, many radio dramas, both old and new, are able to be distributed to a wide audience. In my thesis, I plan to write a radio drama in verse that will act as a homage to the legacy of 1940s radio dramas, as well as explore the question of how such a dynamic and vocal form of art can be reimaged through poetry. This drama in verse will tell the fictional story about a state media radio host who falls in love with the voice of a pirate radio operator hijacking the state's propagandistic broadcasts and chooses to help her take over the airwaves. It will be told through a series of twenty-five poems and formatted within a radio script.

To complete this task, I will have to plot out the story that I plan to tell and then divide it into themes and segments to separate the story into poems. I will also have to listen to and

study culturally impactful dramas from the 1940s, and pay attention to the language they use, and how I could transfer that sound into my own script.

After, I'll be studying the formatting of radio drama scripts and planning how I can take the poems and display them in a radio drama format to make a complete radio drama in three acts. To me, I've always found radio culture fascinating. I DJ at UVM's WRUV FM Burlington. Exploring how radio can be transferred into poetry, especially in the digital age of podcasts, seems like both a challenge and a joy.

#### 4. Previous Work:

I plan to start this creative project with a quick overview of the history and legacy of 1940s radio dramas. As a result, I will consult the following sources, displayed as an annotated bibliography below:

**Braverman, Jordan. *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II through the Media*. Madison Books, 1996.**

This book is written by Jordan Braverman, a freelance writer and columnist who is a Pulitzer Prize nominee, as well as a Harvard graduate. The book explores how media was used during World War II to help Americans learn about themselves, the war, and the principles they were fighting for. The book aims to create a portrait of "America at war through the words we spoke, read, sang, and heard during those turbulent years when the war's outcome or the events of a postwar world were unknown." Mainly, I'm focusing on the section devoted to radio, "The Programs We Heard," which looks at the impact radio programming had on mass communication and propaganda. Radio dramas, in particular, were a way to rally Americans behind the war. Norman Corwin, a director of many such radio plays, directed thirteen plays of "This is War!" which was then broadcasted to over 20

million listeners each week. “This is War!” in particular was known as a more literary drama, presented in almost poetic verse and intended to uplift a nation through dramatic speeches. The book also covers programming for children, radio soap operas, comedy, and suspenseful dramas (crime and mysteries). This source is important because it not only addresses the impact of 1940s radio dramas, but also the motivations behind them and the messages they broadcasted.

**Biewen, John, and Alexa Dilworth. *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound*. University of North Carolina Press, 2010.**

This book is a collection of essays by various authors that revolve around storytelling through the radio. Some of the authors write dramas, others are analyzing some of their favorites. This book caught my eye as a more contemporary look into radio dramas and a way to quickly get multiple perspectives on the topic.

**Squier, Susan Merrill, Editor. *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*. Duke University Press, 2003.**

This book is a collaboration between thirteen scholars and professors from a variety of universities, edited by Susan Squier. This work examines how radio broadcasts shaped American culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and how it was impacted by a variety of issues, such as race relations, gender politics, and the construction of regional and national identities. There are a variety of communities and cultures covered by this book, which I greatly appreciated diving into. A few examples are “Caribbean Voices on the Air,” “Black Radio,” and the ways radio has become gendered. In order to appreciate and understand the impact that radio (not just the dramas) has impacted various communities in the United States, I felt that this was an

important read. While perhaps not getting as in-depth to the culture surrounding radio dramas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this book helps provide a wider understanding of the nuances in this era in radio.

**Dann, Lance. (2014). *Only half the story: Radio drama, online audio and transmedia storytelling*. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*. 12. 10.1386/rjao.12.1-2.141\_1.**

This paper discusses the evolution of the radio drama genre, and how it has changed with the advent of online audio. Many people may assume that the art of the radio drama died in the twentieth century, but it just evolved, at this paper explores that. I found this paper interesting in how it helps to trace the changing face of the genre.

Beyond these sources (and others I continue to find), I also have a call scheduled with my grandmother, who grew up listening to radio dramas in the era I'm studying. I'm excited to get her perspective on how the stories she grew up with impacted her, and how she would separate the style of radio dramas from other genres or forms of storytelling.

I also have done some reading into the art of writing radio dramas, also in a short annotated bibliography. My goal is for readings like these to help me develop my voice while writing this drama in verse.

**Crook, Tim. *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, 2005.**

Besides the technical skills contained in this work, the book also studies the literary form of audio dramas, covering “the six ages of audio drama,” its evolution, and its cultural impact

from a more theoretical standpoint. Mostly, though, this book covers the practice of writing in the radio drama genre, from important vocabulary, to dialogue, to “the writing agenda” (the rules and structure of a drama, as well as how to put it all together).

**Fossard, Esta de. *Writing and Producing Radio Dramas*. Sage Publ., 2005.**

This book is an even more in-depth look at how to both script and produce a radio drama, one that’s especially aimed at social change. The author, Esta de Fossard, is Senior Communication Advisor at the John Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communications Programs. The book covers language specifics (simplifying vocabulary and sentence structure for clarity, for example), production, and the role that a serial drama takes on in society. As I have never written a radio drama before, this book will be immensely helpful as I dive into the genre.

Finally, my advisor, Professor X, suggested some sequence poems to read and study as I prepare to write. These poems and poets include C.D. Wright’s *One With Others*, Gwendolyn Brook’s *In the Mecca*, Glen Maxwell’s *Time’s Fool, a Tale in Verse, Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* by Marilyn Hacker, Craig Raine’s *History, The Home Movie*, Paul Muldoon’s *Madoc, a Mystery*, and Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets*.

The selection of work to study also includes several poets who were also playwrights such as Derek Walcott and William Butler Yeats. M.L. Abrams and Sally Gaul’s *Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* will also be useful as I complete this project. There are also a variety of radio dramas in verse that I will listen to and study, including Archibald MacLeish’s ‘The Fall of the City,’ Sylvia Plath’s radio play in verse, “Three

Women,” “The Fire On The Snow,” by Douglas Stewart, “Killing Him: A Radio Play” by Yehuda Amichai, and “The Planets: A Modern Allegory,” a radio play written in verse by Alfred Kreymborg. There is also a 1941 survey written by Amy Bonner, “Verse Drama and the Radio,” which I will also be reviewing in the upcoming months.

This review of the “state of the art” for this creative thesis covers the research on 1940s radio dramas, how to write a radio drama, and the craft of sequence poems and novellas in verse. My research will also include (though not in this review), listening to an extensive list of broadcasts and shows from the era, most likely generated from my grandmother’s own memory of what she deems significant to her own memories of the era, as well as more scholarly reviews of which dramas are considered to be the most culturally impactful. Chuck Miller’s articles are a good place to start, as well as a program by Greg Bell, a “radio preservationist and historian.”

All of these sources will be critical as I learn to write my own radio drama in verse that mimics an era of American pop culture.

## 5. Significance

We live in a digital age with new forms of storytelling appearing each day—such as podcasts, online streaming, video games, and even audiobooks. Part of the appeal of these forms is their “shareability,” and people being able to come together over their favorite stories through social media and live streams. As we look forward to what the future of storytelling might be, I think it’s important to consider the past and create something to celebrate that history. As previously mentioned, I run a radio show at WRUV and giving a nod to where this mode of communication came from and why it was so appealing is something I’m excited to explore.

## 6. Methodology and Timeline

- a. June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 – Preliminary research completed
  - i. By this date, I will have returned home from school and my plan is to complete a portion of research through the local library by this date so I can begin writing poems. This also includes interviewing my grandmother.
- b. June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019 – Introduction (first draft)
  - i. Factual “introduction” to the script is complete (first draft) which will help give direction and authenticity to the collection.
- c. July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 – Complete outline of the script
  - i. Though I will already have begun writing poems, I am to have a solid outline of where I plan to take the collection by this date, including larger themes and story arc.
- d. June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 – Poems (first draft)
  - i. By writing one poem per week, I can complete 26 poems by winter break of 2019. During this time, I also plan to revise older poems as I move forward, but it’s important that something new is being put on the page each week and I have a substantial body of poems to work with over winter break.
  - ii. I have given myself an extra month after this deadline to complete any weeks/poems that I may have missed.
- e. February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – Finish placing poems into radio drama format
  - i. As I write my poems, I will be placing them into my radio drama in verse, formatting as I go and transferring the poems into the script. By this date, I

should have a rough draft of all the poems placed in the script, with ten more days afterward to edit.

f. February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – First draft of thesis complete, revisions onward

- i. I aim to have this first draft completed fairly early, in order to give plenty of time for revisions. I think revising and editing may be the most challenging part of this project and something that will take time and consideration. Part of this process will be getting feedback from other writers and friends, so plenty of time is needed for this step.

## 7. References

Biewen, John, and Alexa Dilworth. *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound*. University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Braverman, Jordan. *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II through the Media*. Madison Books, 1996.

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